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THE SIN OF SCHISM:

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S E R M O N.

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Price 6d. each, or 4s. a dozen.



THE
SIN OF SCHISM:
A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
PARISH CHURCH OF REMPSTONE,
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE,

On SUNDAY, JULY 6, 1800.

By EDWARD PEARSON, B. D.
RECTOR. *K*

IPSWICH:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY M. JERMYN.

SOLD ALSO BY BRANSBY, IPSWICH; TUPMAN, NOTTINGHAM;
ADAMS, LOUGHBOROUGH; RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S
CHURCH-YARD, AND HATCHARD, PICCADILLY,



TO
WILLIAM GREGORY WILLIAMS,
ESQUIRE,
HIGH SHERIFF
OF THE
COUNTY OF NOTTINGHAM.

Dear Sir,

IN consequence of your suggestion, when the following Discourse was delivered, that the publication of it, in the particular situation of our neighbourhood, might be beneficial, I have ventured to commit it to the press. As it was not compiled with a view to publication, the want of entire originality will not, I presume, bring upon me the charge of blamable plagiarism; and it will not, I am assured, lessen the good effect, which you hope for, to acknowledge, that some of the
arguments

arguments made use of in the middle part of the Discourse are selected, with more or less alteration in the mode of expression, from Dr. Rogers's Persuasive to Conformity.*

I am, dear Sir,

respectfully and sincerely,

Yours,

E. PEARSON.

August 1, 1800.

* Perhaps it would be of use, at the present crisis, if that excellent tract were re-published in a separate form. It is in the third volume of his posthumous works.

THE SIN OF SCHISM:

A

S E R M O N.

1 Cor. i. 10.

I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you.

IT is evident, from a perusal of the Chapter, of which these words are part, that the divisions, against which St. Paul here cautions his Corinthian converts, are *religious divisions*, or what is commonly termed *schism*. This is an offence, of which those, who commit it, are not perhaps sufficiently aware of the enormity. Because schism, or a needless departure

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from the established form of religion, is not criminal in a *legal* sense, a diversity of forms being permitted by the state, many persons are hence too apt to conclude, that neither is it any crime in a *religious* sense. To those, however, who will duly attend to the subject, it may easily be shewn to be a great one. It is a breach of that union, which Christ has enjoined; an opposition to that method of promoting religious knowledge, and exercising religious affections, which is prescribed in the Gospel, and therefore a crime against God. There may be *just* reasons of separation, and it is our duty to entertain charitable sentiments towards those, who do separate themselves from us, whether they have a just reason of separation or not; but it is by no means a matter of indifference, whether a person continues in the established religion of his country, or lightly goes off to join in any other religious community, whose opinions or modes of worship, from *novelty*, or any other circumstance of a similar nature, may happen to please his *fancy*. No one can depart from the established religion of the state without being guilty of the sin, against

against which we are cautioned in the text, unless he is previously convinced in his conscience, that such terms of communion are required of him, as are plainly *unlawful*; such as are contrary to the will of God, either as collected from reason, or as made known to us by revelation.

That concord and union among Christians is a duty prescribed by the Gospel, no one can doubt, who is at all conversant with the apostolic writings. The precepts of the Gospel plainly require an union of *love* and *charity* among its disciples, a tendernefs of affection, a readiness to perform all offices of humanity and benevolence towards each other. They require also, as the distinguishing union of Christians, that we have one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and one Mediator Christ Jesus; that we worship the same God, trust in the same Redeemer, profess the same belief, and acknowledge the same Sacraments. There is also a still further union required of us, namely, a communication with each other in the outward offices and ordinances of the Christian religion. To those, who are

not sufficiently convinced of this ; who are not aware how much the last-mentioned union is a Gospel duty, I would recommend a careful perusal of the first four Chapters of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, in which they will find it very strongly insisted on. But, independently of the express directions of Scripture to this purpose, our obligation to this union would appear, considered only as the most effectual means of cultivating that love and charity, which the Gospel in general requires of Christians ; and, I may add, which the peace and happiness of the civil society, to which we belong, require of them ; for the promotion of these is also an unquestionable duty of our holy religion. I remember, indeed, a passage of a pious and ingenious writer*, in which he compares the variety of religious sects among Protestants to the variety of colours in a bed of pinks or tulips, where the beauty of each is heightened and improved by the contrast ; and he thinks, that, in like manner, Christians also, agreeing in all *essential*

* James Hervey, Reflections on a Flower-Garden.

points, but differing in matters of *inferior* importance, might, by mutual forbearance, and the exercise of charity, improve in the dispositions, which it is the great object of Christianity to cultivate. This, however, seems a thing more to be wished for than expected. Unhappily, the fact is far different. How fatal a tendency divisions in religion have to alienate men's hearts from each other; how naturally they produce strife and variance; how much they put it in the power of designing men to divide us into worldly factions and parties; how destructive they are of public peace and of private charity, needs no other proof than our own experience: consequently, the being united in religious community is, in the same proportion, an effectual means to prevent and cure these evils, and to promote that love and charity, that peace and happiness, which they destroy. If, then, it be our duty by all lawful means to promote these good ends, it is also our duty, so far as we lawfully may, to be united in *religious communion*, as part of the means most conducive to them. This argument, therefore, will infer our ob-

ligation to be joined in religious communion *if it be possible, and as far as lies in us*; and, doubtless, the divine wisdom had these happy effects in view in commanding it. The duty, however, is incumbent on us, not only as the means of producing these good effects, but also in consequence of the command itself; for it is our duty to obey the commands of God, whether we are able to discover the particular *reason* of them or not.

In what *acts* this religious communion consists, we may collect from Scripture. Concerning the first converts to the Christian church we read, that '*they continued stedfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*' They continued firm and undivided in the belief and profession of that doctrine, which the Apostles taught, united in one *fellowship, society, or church*, over which they presided; and testified this union by communicating with them and each other in *prayer*, and in receiving together the sacrament of the *Lord's supper*, that great symbol of Christian fellowship, by which, as the Apostle tells us, *we, being many, are one bread*

bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread. What was the duty of those first Christians, remains a duty to *all* Christians unto the end of the world. All Christians are as much obliged as *they* were to be united in the same fellowship or society; under persons succeeding to the Apostles in the ministry and oversight of the Church, and to communicate in worship and other public ordinances of religion. For, all *after-conversions* made but an addition to that first society of Christians, which society continued still one *Catholic Apostolic church, one body*, though enlarged and extended over the whole earth; and though the ends of worship and government made it necessary, that this Catholic society, so enlarged and extended, should be subdivided into many *less* societies, or particular churches.

It being, then, the duty of all Christians to be united in church-fellowship, the nature of the thing points out to us, as the most practicable method of observing this duty, that so many Christians as, by the neighbourhood of their habitation, can conveniently meet together in the same assembly, should be joined in one
congre-

congregation or church, and communicate with each other in the several ordinances of religion; and yet, by holding an unity of doctrine, and observing a sameness of worship with all the churches within the same region or civil dominion, remain a part of that greater society, which forms the *national church*.

We may easily see, therefore, what is implied by that religious and social union, that *communion of saints*, which the precepts of the Gospel enjoin, and the constitution of every Christian church, as a society, requires of its members. It is implied, first, that all combinations of churches are bound, as members of the same body, to observe some common laws of Christian confederacy; to profess the same rule of faith, acknowledge each other's administrations, be disposed mutually to communicate in worship, and, in order to that, agree in the same general terms of communion, and submit to such rules of peace and order, as are established by the joint consent and authority of the whole body. Secondly, this communion of saints implies, that all the members of each particular church or congregation should

should communicate with each other in worship, and other ordinances of religion, under the rules agreed on by the general association, or national church, in which they are incorporated; and, according to their several stations, pay all due submission to the authority of those, who preside over it; for, without this, it is impossible that *any* social union should be preserved.

Now, if such an union as this be a duty founded on plain precepts of the Gospel, a *breach* of it, where it can be preserved, must be a great sin; which sin has obtained the name of *schism*, or *division*. If two or more particular churches set up different rules of faith, refuse to communicate with each other in worship, in breaking of bread and in prayer, and renounce each other's administrations, there is doubtless a *schism*, a breach of Christian union, between them. In like manner, if any *members* of a particular church renounce its worship and assemblies, refuse to communicate with it in the ordinances of religion, withdraw all obedience from the guides and pastors of it, and set up distinct assemblies in opposition to it, there
is

is evidently a schism between the members of that church; a breach of that spiritual union and *bond of peace*, which the Christian religion prescribes. In these cases, the only question is, who are the schismatics, or on whom the guilt of such separation lies.

Let us now apply these principles to the general case of those, who separate themselves from the established church of England. There is evidently between us a breach of that communion of saints, of that union and spiritual society, which the Gospel requires among Christians. The congregations, to which *they* are joined, and the national and parish church, from which they separate, hold no communion, but stand in opposition to each other. The teachers, whom they have chosen, and to whose guidance they have committed themselves, own no relation to our society, but renounce all subjection to its rules and authority. In the language of the primitive church, here is altar set up against altar, worship against worship, pastor against pastor. If ever there was a schism in any age or part of the Christian church, here is one between us: and, if the
Apostle

Apostle so severely reproved the contentions, which arose in the church of *Corinth*, while one said, *I am of Paul*, another, *I am of Apollos*, another, *I am of Cephas*, and declares them to be *carnal*, though the persons, by whose names they wished to be distinguished, were in communion with each other, and joint ministers of the same church; how much more carnal would he have reckoned the contentions of those, who are enlisted under teachers holding no communion with each other, but professing themselves members of opposite societies! If he blames divisions among them, though they were such, as did not rise to an actual *separation*, but that they still *came together* in the church; how much more blamable would he have thought the divisions of those, who forsake the assembling of themselves together, and renounce each other's congregations! Here is doubtless a sinful separation between us; and, as it is a matter of *fact*, that the separation has been made by a departure from the national church, it lies upon those, who have departed, to shew, that the *reasons* of their departure are such as will justify it.

If our church requires from them, as a condition of communion, any thing *unlawful*; if, as *we* objected to the church of *Rome*, when we separated from *it*, they cannot join in our worship and offices without doing something, which the laws of Christ have forbidden, then are *we* the schismatics, and *they* are justified in departing from us. But, on the contrary, if our church requires nothing from them, as a condition of communion, which is unlawful; if they may join in our worship and offices, and observe all rules prescribed to them in their station, without doing any thing, which the laws of Christ have forbidden, then are *we* guiltless, and the sin of the separation must lie upon *them*. This is the plain and simple rule, by which we must guide ourselves in this important matter. It is not sufficient to say, 'we think it more *expedient*, or more *edifying*, to worship God in this or that particular way, rather than in the way prescribed by the church.' For, if this were admitted as a just reason of separation, it would tend to the destruction of all social worship whatever. When God and man command different things,
here

there is no question, but that *God is to be obeyed rather than man*; but, when our lawful and proper superiors enjoin nothing, which any law of God has forbidden, then it is evident, that we may obey man, without disobeying God; and, since God has in general commanded us to *obey and submit ourselves to those, who rule over us, and watch for our souls*, he, who pays this submission to them, within the proper limits of their authority, performs a Christian duty, and, in obeying men, obeys God.

It will scarcely be expected, that, in this Discourse, I should enter into the particular objections, which have been urged against our church. The reasons for dissent have indeed been so different, at different times, that it would not be easy to know when all objections were considered. Many of the original reasons of dissent have long since been given up, and new ones substituted in their stead; a circumstance, which alone would lead us to suspect, that no *good* reason for dissent subsists at all. Sometimes, the form of our church government is objected, though that form,

comprehending the appointment of *bishops*, *priests*, and *deacons*, is clearly of Apostolic institution, and actually subsisted in all Christian churches throughout the world for almost fifteen hundred years; sometimes, the practice of *infant baptism*, though that practice comes recommended to us by the most probable interpretation of many passages of Scripture, by the circumcision of infants among the Jews, and by the usage of the ancient Christian church; sometimes, our praying by a *prescribed form*, though the use of forms of prayer is so rational in itself, and so fully justified by the example of our Saviour; sometimes, the ceremony of *kneeling at receiving the Lord's supper*, though that ceremony, expressive of humility and reverence, is so appropriate to the sentiments professed at that ordinance, and, when explained as it is among us, in so little danger of being mis-interpreted; sometimes, the wearing of a *surplice*, though the wearing of that, or of any prescribed habit, will be thought by those, who duly consider the effect of association on the mind, as conspiring, with other external observances of
order

order and decency, to promote religious affections, and must at least be allowed to be a harmless regulation. There is, besides, the less occasion to enter into a discussion of the *particular* reasons for dissent, because I have, if I mistake not, furnished you with a reply to them *all*. It cannot be pretended, that our church requires, as a condition of communion, any thing *unlawful*; and certain it is, that whoever departs from it, without being able to assign this as the reason of his departure, must incur, in a greater or less degree, the guilt of the sin, against which we are cautioned in the text. I do not deny, indeed, that our church may require from those, who offer themselves as its *ministers*, conditions of admission to that office, to which they cannot, perhaps, conscientiously submit; and it is but too true, that such persons, from the desire of being employed as ministers, are often industrious in endeavouring to form separate congregations. This, however, is no justification of those, who may be prevailed on to separate themselves from the established church; and it concerns them to take care, that, in their
B 2 separation,

separation, they fall not under the description of those, whom the Apostle censures, as *not being able to endure sound doctrine; who, after their own lusts, heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; turning away their ears from the truth, and being turned unto fables.* To him, who employs himself in promoting a separation from the church, it might be right to say, 'with your opinions, Sir, you may be justified in avoiding the ministry of the church; but it does not follow, that you are justified in separating yourself from its communion; much less, that you are justified in persuading *me* to separate.' The change of religion is in itself an evil of no inconsiderable magnitude, and ought not, in any case, to be lightly hazarded. People are apt to confound the outward *forms* of religion with religion itself; there is danger, therefore, that a change in the forms may give an irrecoverable shock to the religious principle, even if it should not, as is too commonly the case, be productive also of uncharitable sentiments towards those, from whom we separate. How, therefore, a change from the form of religion

religion established among us; a form, which has had the approbation of many of the most learned and pious Christians both of our own and of foreign reformed countries; how a change from this to any other form now subsisting in the world can be justified, is a problem, which, I believe, no separatist in the kingdom, who acknowledges the same essential doctrines, will ever be able to solve.

It evidently appears, from what has been said, that whoever is desirous of justifying himself in departing from the established religion of the country, must not only be prepared to give some *reason* for his departure, but such a reason, as has now been mentioned; he must be able to say, that the established church requires his assent to such doctrines, or his joining in such a mode of worship, as he thinks, in his conscience, is inconsistent with the will of God. Something, perhaps, may be said in defence of those separatists, who were born of dissenting parents, and brought up in dissenting principles. They do not *make* the schism, but *find* it; and the strength of early prejudices and habits is so great, as

not to be easily overcome. But I have no hesitation in saying, that whoever, under the circumstances I have referred to, sets up or supports a *fresh* separation from the church, transgresses a plain and evident duty, and has a great sin to answer for at the throne of God.

What then shall we say of those, who, in our days, and in our neighbourhood, not only offend against these plain principles of duty; who not only separate without sufficient reason, but who, in the *mode* of their separation, proceed in direct opposition to an express command of Scripture? I refer to the hateful and disgusting practice of *female* preaching, and the encouragement afforded it. St. Paul, in the fourteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, says, "*Let your women keep silence in the church; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And, if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*" Here we plainly see, that, in the judgment of St. Paul, it was a thing altogether

altogether improper and unbecoming for a woman to speak in the public assemblies of the people, even to ask questions for her own instruction. What would he have said of those women, who presumptuously take upon themselves the public instruction of *others*? Also, in the second chapter of his epistle to Timothy, he again says, "*I suffer not a woman to teach.*" The rule is so general, as to leave no room for exceptions. It is, then, the judgment of St. Paul, expressed in terms, which none can mis-interpret, that a woman is not to undertake the office of a preacher in the public assemblies of the people; and, while we are acting in opposition to the judgment of an inspired Apostle, it signifies nothing by what *other* authority we endeavour to justify ourselves. God has given us the holy Scriptures as the guide of our life; and, if we knowingly and wilfully act in opposition to them, we must stand at his judgment seat without excuse.

An attempt has been made, indeed, to justify the disregard to these passages of Scripture, by alleging others of a contrary tendency.

tendency. But, can it be supposed by any one, who duly reverences the Scripture, that one part of it, when rightly understood, is contradictory to another? One part of Scripture may be more obscure than another, and very wise reasons may be assigned why the meaning of the prophetic parts in particular should not be fully disclosed, 'till the events, to which they refer, come to pass; but all of them, being the word of that God, who cannot lie, when rightly interpreted, are perfectly consistent with each other. It is a maxim universally agreed on, that, if any thing is expressed obscurely in one part of Scripture, it is to be explained by other parts, in which the same thing is expressed more clearly. Now, nothing can be more clear on the subject before us, than the words of St. Paul, which I have just recited. It will, therefore, at the day of judgment, be but a poor excuse to allege, for having acted in opposition to them, that you found other passages in Scripture, which you imagined had a different meaning. The prophecy of Joel*, in which

* Chap. ii. v. 28, 29.

it is said, "*And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days, will I pour out my spirit,*" is, I believe, the passage of Scripture, by which female preaching is attempted to be defended. But, if you turn to the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles*, you will find, that, in the judgment of the Apostle St. Peter, this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when the gift of the Holy Ghost was miraculously poured forth upon the Apostles, and manifested itself in the power of speaking divers languages, in which they had never been previously instructed. How long, indeed, the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were continued in the church, has been matter of much dispute; and perhaps it is a question, which neither admits nor requires a very accurate decision. It is, however, the universal opinion of the best interpreters of Scripture,

* Ver. 16.

that

that those gifts were to be continued no longer, than 'till Christianity should obtain a firm footing in the world, and should lay the foundation of such evidence of its truth, on principles of reason and argument, as would render the assistance of supernatural testimony unnecessary; and that, in fact, they were totally withdrawn many ages ago. It is incumbent on those, who allege the authority of Scripture for any opinions or practices, which the generality of well-informed Christians seem agreed to condemn, to have good grounds of assurance, that they understand the true *sense* of Scripture. To this end, let them study the Scriptures with humility and diligence, and let them seek for such assistance in the study of them, as may be most likely to direct them right. Let them be as religious as they please; they cannot be too much so; but let them not think of being religious by disobeying the commands of God. Christ and his Apostles have pointed out the method, in which the Gospel is to be preached and supported in the world, and it is presumptuous in man to change it. Let those, who attempt to offer a
sacrifice

sacrifice unto God at the expence of obeying his commands, be afraid of the prophet's rebuke, "*Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams* *."

Let self-appointed teachers in general recollect what the same prophet said to Saul, when, in his zeal that sacrifice should not be omitted, he took on himself the office of priest; an office, which, as St. Paul says, "*no man taketh unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron* †." "*Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee* §." Let them also review the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, as related in the sixteenth chapter of the book of Numbers; and let them seriously consider whether, though they should escape the particular fate of those unhappy men, those "*sinners against their own*

* 1 Sam. xv. 22.

† Heb. v. 4.

§ 1 Sam. xiii. 13. See also 1 Kings xiii. 33 & 34.

souls,"

souls," they are also entirely free from the like guilt.

I will add, though the consideration may seem of inferior importance, that all unlicensed preaching is an offence against that *human* authority, to which we all owe submission and obedience. What good can be expected from a service, which originates in the breach of a clear and indispensable obligation? "Ye must needs be subject," says the Apostle, "not only for *wrath*, but also for *conscience*' sake;" not only from fear of the punishments, which may follow, but also from a sense of duty; from a conviction, that, without obedience to the laws of your country, human society cannot be maintained, nor the will of God respecting it fulfilled.

Some, I understand, disregarding the declarations of Scripture on this subject, plead, in justification of their disregard, the paramount authority of *immediate inspiration*. As it is the most favourable interpretation of such pretensions to suppose, that they are the result of *enthusiasm*, it would be in vain to oppose them by any thing in the shape of argument; but

but it will not be without use to remind those, who may be called upon to acknowledge the claim to such inspiration in their teachers, that Christ and his Apostles did not rest the proof of their inspiration on their own *assertion*, but on their power of *working miracles*; and that, as no one in these days has the power of working miracles, so no one is justified in saying, that he speaks by the immediate inspiration or direction of God. Christ, indeed, has promised, that he will be present with his church *always, even unto the end of the world*. This, however, does not mean, that he will so assist those, to whom he may commit the ministry of the Gospel, as to render the exertion of their natural faculties and the means of improving them unnecessary; much less, that he will so assist them, as to supersede his own dispensations: but that he will give such a blessing to their sincere endeavours in promoting the knowledge and influence of his religion, as shall not fail to make them eventually successful.

If there are any, who, from considerations still less defensible than those I have mentioned;

tioned ; who, from the vanity of being listened to by numbers of their own rank, or the ambition of obtaining an influence over them, or any other worldly consideration whatever, leave that form of worship, which, in their hearts, they approve and prefer, and not only countenance by their attendance, but take part in the administration of a different one, it cannot be expected, that any thing I can urge will have much effect on *them* *. With respect to such, I shall only observe, that, as they seek a prize different from that, which religion in any form has to offer, if they succeed in their

* By some it will hardly be believed, that there are those, who consider their attendance at church as a personal favour conferred on the officiating clergyman, and who regulate their conformity to the establishment by their affection towards its ministers. I have witnessed the effects, in this respect, of a clergyman's conduct ; and have often seen the conferring of a favour returned, and the withholding of one resented, on the following Sunday : nay, I have heard of a person, who, in a negotiation with his pastor on some temporal concern, threw out, by way of threat, as an argument for obtaining a better bargain, ' I hope, Sir, you will not drive me away from the church.'

particular

particular purpose, they "*have their reward,*" and must not expect to find it in those spiritual satisfactions, those joyful retrospections of the past, and those still more joyful lookings-forward to the future, which the religious man only can experience.

Now, to God, &c.

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